

- 7 -

U S S R - I R A N

MOSCOW CHIDES IRANIAN OFFICIALS FOR "UNCONSTRUCTIVE" STANDS

Seeking to turn Iranian hostility toward the United States to its own advantage, Moscow continues to praise Iran's steadfast stand against imperialism and to support "just" Iranian demands against the United States, while generally avoiding comment on the "so-called" hostage crisis. But Moscow is having problems with its own "superpower" image in Iran. It has avoided responding to Iranian criticism of the Soviet role in Afghanistan, but its uneasy relationship with Tehran is evident in low-key sniping over various bilateral issues.

GROMYKO ENDORSEMENT, MEDIA REPROOF

Soviet approbation for Iran has been voiced at the elite level, while the carping has appeared only in media commentary. Foreign Minister Gromyko, at a 17 March luncheon for his Hungarian counterpart, hailed Iran for "giving a good example of steadfastness" in defending itself against "imperialist pressure, blackmail, and threats." Soviet commentaries have clearly registered Moscow's distress over evidence of Tehran's hostility toward the Soviet Union but have only mildly criticized Iranian leaders:

† Mossadeq Period: Gromyko's tribute followed by less than two weeks a TASS complaint, replayed in the 8 March PRAVDA, about Iranian President Bani-Sadr's remarks on the anniversary of the death of Prime Minister Mossadeq. Bani-Sadr's inclusion of the USSR among the opponents of Mossadeq's regime amounted to "distorting the essence" of Soviet-Iranian relations in that era and stemmed from "insufficient knowledge of the documents of that period," TASS said. Moscow's Persian-language service found Bani-Sadr's statement "surprising."

† Student Militants: A current and much more sensitive issue was handled obliquely. PRAVDA on 15 March rejected a Western press report of Soviet influence over the Iranian militants holding the American hostages. The paper did not, however, acknowledge Bani-Sadr's remark in a recent interview that the militants occupying the U.S. Embassy are sometimes influenced by "some political groups favorable to the USSR, like the Tudeh Party."

† Soviet "Superpower": Disagreement with Ayatollah Khomeyni, as well as with Bani-Sadr, was cautiously expressed by IZVESTIYA's authoritative political observer Aleksandr Bovin, who in the past year and a half has periodically offered Moscow's most candid

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FBIS TRENDS
19 MARCH 1980

- 8 -

assessments of Iran's difficulties. On the weekly Moscow domestic service observers roundtable on the 16th, Bovin cited Bani-Sadr as referring to the Russian "superpower" and saying that after the Soviet Union completes its "business" in Afghanistan, it will "take us in hand too." And he quoted Khomeyni as condemning both "American domination" and "the assault by the aggressive East." These statements, Bovin mildly complained, are "all in all not what I would call a constructive way to formulate the question." This was the first time Moscow reproved Khomeyni by name—albeit in a program not broadcast to Persian audiences—although Bovin last September did indict unidentified Iranian "theologians." A Persian-language broadcast on 14 February even contrived to present Khomeyni as having been misquoted on the subject of superpowers—a frequent topic in his pronouncements. Suggesting that "Beijing hegemonists" and those "who do not wish to make a basic distinction between socialism and imperialism" were responsible, the broadcast contended that some "radio talks" had commented on Khomeyni's statements as though his criticisms had been aimed "equally at the two superpowers." These people, the radio said, sought to create discord between Moscow and Tehran and to split the "united front of the anti-imperialist revolution of Iran."

+ Soviet Security: That instability in Iran would arouse Soviet concern over the security of that portion of its southern border was suggested in remarks by Middle East expert Igor Belyayev in a 12 March "dialog" with his former PRAVDA colleague, Oriental Institute Director Yevgeniy Primakov. Belyayev cryptically raised the question of Soviet security in a reference to the USSR's 1921 treaties with Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey. Invoking Lenin, he called the Soviet Union's southern border region a "zone of good-neighborliness" but went on to add that while the USSR makes no territorial claim on the three states, it "cannot allow these countries to be used to undermine its security"—an argument Moscow has been using to justify its Afghan intervention. The anniversary of the February 1921 Soviet-Iranian treaty was commemorated routinely in a Persian-language commentary that maintained the Soviet silence on Iran's November 1979 abrogation of two treaty articles outlining the conditions under which either side might dispatch military forces into the other's territory.

+ Gas Price: The recent stalemated Soviet-Iranian talks in Tehran on the price of gas exported to the USSR prompted both complaints about Iran's "unconstructive and somewhat strange position" and reminders of Soviet generosity in economic agreements with Iran. A 7 March interview with a Soviet foreign trade official—broadcast in Persian prior to the departure of the Soviet negotiators for Tehran—indirectly challenged recent statements by Iranian Energy Minister Mo'infar on the price question and called him a "newcomer in this field." Pointing out that Iran has no competitive buyer

- 9 -

for its gas, the official concluded that Soviet-Iranian cooperation is "apparently" advisable and cryptically suggested that "some personalities" in Iran should "show courage for this purpose and regard reality with genuine feelings." Following the breakdown of the talks, TASS on the 17th complained that the Iranian price is "clearly exaggerated and economically unjustified" but remained hopeful that a "reasonable approach"--clearly by the Iranian side--to problems of economic cooperation, including gas supplies, will prevail.

HOSTAGE ISSUE Moscow's selective treatment of the hostage crisis has continued to focus on Iran's "just" demands, carefully avoiding judgment on the seizure and detention of the hostages. During the UN commission's 23 February-11 March stay in Tehran, Soviet media reported the commission's activities and noted statements by Iranian officials to the effect that the group's work had nothing to do with the hostages. TASS on 11 March attempted to reconstruct the events of the last few days of the commission's stay as Foreign Minister Qotbzadeh, the student militants, the Revolution Council, and Khomeyni's office issued conflicting statements about a commission meeting with the hostages and whether the hostages would remain under the militants' control or whether the council would assume responsibility. TASS concluded only that in the opinion of "the majority of Iranians," the release of the hostages should be accompanied by compliance with Iran's demands that the United States recognize its past "unlawful" interference in Iranian affairs and undertake not to interfere in the future and not to prevent the extradition of the shah and the return of his "plundered" wealth. IZVESTIYA's Bovin, in the 16 March radio roundtable discussion, said the "official Iranian viewpoint" is that "the whole business will be resolved" when the Iranian parliament meets in May.

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FBIS TRENDS
19 MARCH 1980

- 10 -

"NATIONAL VOICE" SUPPORTS IRANIAN DEMANDS FOR RETURN OF SHAH

The Baku-based clandestine radio "National Voice of Iran" (NVOI) continues to offer support to Ayatollah Khomeyni while at the same time attempting to influence Tehran to adopt policies more agreeable to the Soviet Union. The radio has not repeated its oblique calls of last November for the release of the U.S. hostages.

In addressing the hostage question, NVOI now generally parrots the pronouncements of Ayatollah Khomeyni, although it has aired some cryptic intimations that Iran should seek a resolution of the issue. Scorning the "promises and confessions" of American officials as a quid pro quo for release of the hostages, a 15 February talk maintained that Iran's "legitimate and just" demands for the return of the shah and his wealth must first be satisfied. But the commentary also maintained, without elaboration, that the problem should be resolved on the basis of Khomeyni's "guidelines," Iran's "national interests," and the preservation of Iran's "credibility." A 24 February commentary left the solution open; it dismissed as useless and unfounded any expectation that President Carter will confess past U.S. "crimes" in Iran or fulfill any other Iranian demands and declared that it is up to the Iranian people and government "to decide what they should or should not do." As for the mission of the UN commission in Iran, NVOI noted on 1 March, in a commentary reflecting statements by various Iranian officials, that the group was to investigate the "crimes" of the shah and the United States, "and nothing else."

The radio has repeatedly warned against alleged liberal, conciliatory, and even pro-American tendencies on the part of important--but unnamed--officials. Following the UN commission's departure from Tehran, NVOI praised the militants for their loyalty to Khomeyni and cautioned what it called highly placed circles for allegedly showing a spirit of conciliation toward the United States. Anti-American demonstrators, it remarked, had recently called for "death to the conciliators." Other talks have attacked "adaptable liberals" for supposedly supporting imperialism and have approvingly noted that Khomeyni is gradually pushing "these gentlemen" aside. Similarly, in pressing for Iranian reciprocity to Afghan bids for goods relations, NVOI has criticized "certain responsible officials" in Iran for using the Afghan events as an "alibi" to restore U.S.-Iranian relations. Before the January presidential elections, the radio, in implicit rejoinder to various Iranian officials' condemnations of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, accused unidentified presidential candidates of bringing up the "bogey of communism and so-called communist threats." Other comment in recent

- 11 -

weeks has featured such standard themes as the need for purges in the government and army and has routinely attacked Iranian "feudalists" and condemned assorted Iranian "enemies" such as the United States, China, and Egypt.

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FBIS TRENDS
19 MARCH 1980

- 12 -

USSR - YUGOSLAVIA

MOSCOW, BELGRADE TRADE POLEMICS OVER INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Moscow has provided graphic new evidence of its willingness to risk a quarrel with Belgrade over Yugoslav challenges to its foreign policy while continuing to reassure Belgrade of its friendly intentions. The latest Soviet rumblings on this score came when PRAVDA on 13 March reprinted a biting Vietnamese criticism of Yugoslavia's positions on Kampuchea, Afghanistan, and other issues. Belgrade, its usual sensitivity to Soviet attacks heightened by Tito's critical illness, responded with characteristic forcefulness.

The PRAVDA reprint of an article in the 10 March Vietnamese army daily QUAN DOI NHAN DAN used the issues of Kampuchea and Afghanistan to question Yugoslavia's credentials as a leader in the nonaligned movement. It maintained that Belgrade's positions on foreign intervention in these countries played into the hands of Washington and Beijing, set Yugoslavia "at loggerheads with the lofty aims" of nonalignment, and made Belgrade "lose authority" in the movement. It also charged that recent efforts by the Yugoslav foreign secretary to convene a nonaligned conference on Afghanistan were intended to encourage the nonaligned countries to "act against the Soviet Union and Afghanistan."

Belgrade has sharply refuted the Vietnamese allegations and has questioned Moscow's motives in republishing them. Outspoken Belgrade BORBA commentator Teslic on 16 March rejected charges that Yugoslavia has joined the "chorus of Washington and Beijing" or "any other chorus," and accused Moscow of "twisting Yugoslav policy" and trying to "sow dissent in the ranks of the nonaligned countries." He said that Moscow has shown a "lack of respect" for Yugoslavia's basic principles of independence—the same principles, he noted, on which Soviet-Yugoslav relations are based. Similarly, TANJUG on 13 March called the Soviet allegations an "unprincipled, biased, and completely groundless attack against Yugoslavia" and complained that Soviet readers have repeatedly been kept uninformed of Belgrade's real stands on international issues.

While the Vietnamese criticism—endorsed by Moscow—is unusually sharp and wide-ranging, it is generally consistent with complaints Moscow has lodged against Yugoslavia during the past year and a half. Moscow has attacked Belgrade for allegedly siding with the United States and China on both the Kampuchean and Afghanistan issues—the latter